

Southern Pacific Oakland Mole & Pier
Oakland Point Pier
Alameda County, California

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH - DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORICAL AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

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SOUTHERN PACIFIC OAKLAND MOLE AND PIER

ADDRESS: Foot of 7th Street, Oakland
Alameda County, California

OWNER: Southern Pacific Company (lessee)
City of Oakland Port Commission

OCCUPANT: Southern Pacific Company

USE: Railroad and Ferry Terminal

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Site first used in an organized transportation system as ferry landing in 1862, then called Oakland Point, though used as a landing since founding of Oakland in 1852. Became terminus of transcontinental trains November 8, 1869; and facilities expanded to Oakland Long Wharf which opened to traffic January 16, 1871. Developed into Oakland Mole and Pier by Central Pacific, which opened to traffic January 22, 1882, while Long Wharf continued as shipping terminal for freight until 1919. Ferry commuter service was discontinued January 1939, and all ferry service was discontinued on July 30, 1958. Terminal was abandoned for all operational use May 14, 1960. Lease expires November 23, 1960 and site reverts to City of Oakland.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The final linking of the transcontinental railways is generally credited to the driving of the "Golden Spike" at Promontory Point in Utah on May 10, 1869, which linked the Central Pacific with the Union Pacific; but it was not until September 6, 1869, that the final rails were laid at Vallejo's Mills in Alameda County that completed a continuous connected line of steel rails from the Atlantic to the Pacific. On that day, two trains left Sacramento with eleven overland passengers, a host of local people and railroad officials and traveled on the route through the Arroya de la Alameda, now Niles Canyon, to celebrate the consummation of this stupendous undertaking. After the ceremonies at Vallejo's Mills, one train switched off to the south on its way to San Jose. The other train, pulled by three wood burner engines, continued on over the rails of the San Francisco and Alameda Railroad to Alameda. Another celebration was held by Alameda inhabitants who hoped to retain Alameda as the western terminus,

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and then on to Alameda Point, where the passengers embarked on the ferryboat "ALAMEDA" for San Francisco.

The community of Vallejo's Mills, so called because Jose de Jesus Vallejo had been operating grist mills there on his Mexican land grant since 1841, was renamed "NILES" in honor of Judge Addison Niles, an official of Central Pacific. Niles, which is now a District of the City of Fremont, remains to this day an important junction for traffic to the south and to the north for both the Southern Pacific and the Western Pacific. The latter railroad completed a parallel route through Niles Canyon in August of 1910.

The San Francisco & Alameda Railroad was created by Alfred A. Cohen, a controversial political and financial figure who envisioned Alameda as the western terminus of the transcontinental railroads, and had started on August 25, 1864, to construct his railroad with a line from High Street on the east to Alameda Point on the west. To fulfill his dream he extended his line to Melrose and on south to Hayward, which was reached by August 1865, and then on to Niles in a move to meet the westward march of the Central Pacific. Associated with Cohen were F. D. Atherton, E. B. Mastie, Charles Minturn, J. D. Farwell, J. G. Kellog, and J. W. Dwinelle.

On the Oakland side of the San Antonio Estuary construction work for the San Francisco & Oakland Railroad, financed by French capital, had begun on August 8, 1862, from Broadway in Oakland to the ferry wharf at the foot of 7th Street, where train passengers embarked on the Contra Costa, a small ferryboat rented from Charles Minturn, for the Davis Street landing in San Francisco. This service was begun on August 2, 1863.

The promoters of the San Francisco & Oakland Railroad were Dr. Robert E. Cole, William Hillegass, Samuel Wood, George Goss, Joseph Black, Charles W. Stephens, Redmond Gibbons and John B. Felton as the first president. Their original plan was to terminate the line on Yerba Buena Island, and an act of the State Legislature on May 20, 1861, authorized the construction of a bridge to the island; but this was nullified by the U. S. Congress by refusing to permit the use of the island as a terminus for the proposed railroad and ferry. The City of Oakland had granted a franchise on November 20, 1861 to this company to operate trains on 7th Street for 50 years for \$1.00. In 1864 a bridge was erected by this company over the canal leading into Lake Merritt, and the rail line was extended to the towns of Clinton and Brooklyn, just east of the lake. This service was inaugurated on April 1, 1865.

On November 1, 1869 the Central Pacific took formal possession of the San Francisco & Oakland Railroad. Months earlier the Western Pacific, a wholly owned subsidiary of Central Pacific, had acquired ownership of the Oakland ferry line, which by then had come under the control of A. A. Cohen, as well as the Cohen-built San Francisco & Alameda Railroad. The Western Pacific referred to here had no relationship or connection with the present railroad of that name, which came along later. It had been organized by the "Big Four" to build the road from Sacramento to San Jose where it was to meet up with the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad.

The Alameda road provided a ready-built temporary service to San Francisco while construction continued on improvements to the rail and ferry facilities on the Oakland side. The ferry wharf at Oakland Point was extended from a half mile to 1.3 miles to deeper water; and rails were laid from Brooklyn to a connection with the Alameda line at Melrose, it having been previously connected with the transcontinental line at Niles on September 6th. On November 8, 1869, the first overland train was routed over the improved 7th Street line to the Oakland Point pier. On May 15, 1870, the section of road between San Leandro and Melrose was opened for traffic, which completed the main line route into Oakland.

In 1873, on April 21, the City of Oakland generously granted a franchise, permitting the Central Pacific to cross Harrison Square on a curve to Sixth and Alice Streets. The deal included the removal of a delapidated depot and freight platform in the middle of Seventh and Broadway, and the building of a new station on Seventh Street between Broadway and Washington Streets. This same Harrison Square is today (1960) being made into a Railroad Museum for old time historical engines and other railroad gear and equipment.

The ferry fleet at the time of the acquisition of the local railroads by Central Pacific, consisted of the WASHOE, a reconstructed river boat that had gone into service during 1865, and an elegant new steamer, the EL CAPITAN, which had been placed on the run to San Francisco during July 1868.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

When the Oakland Wharf came into possession of Central Pacific, it was about 6,900 feet long with width sufficient for one track and a roadway for teams. There was a single slip for the ferry EL CAPITAN.

Plans for enlarging the terminal consisted of a new track for the main overland line, connecting with the old wharf about 4000 feet from the Oakland shore. The wharf itself was to be extended 4200 feet with three tracks and a team roadway. Three slips were constructed, one for the passenger ferry, one for a new freight-car ferry, and another of sufficient capacity to berth four of the largest vessels afloat, with the exception, alone, of the GREAT EASTERN. Warehouses were built alongside for temporary storage of grain and other commodities waiting transshipment. A frontage of more than 4000 feet was available for other ships besides the three slips.

The new two-mile wharf, which became known as the Oakland Long Wharf, was opened for traffic January 16, 1871. In manner of construction and excellence of materials, it was considered the best of any similar structure in the world.

Additions were made to the wharf until there were five docks providing berths for 22 vessels. Dock "E" was used for handling and storage of trans-Pacific freight. It had a warehouse with 50,000 square feet of floor space. Dock "A" was the coal bunker dock. Long Wharf remained the passenger terminus until Oakland Mole was opened January 22, 1882. It remained as the freight terminus until abandoned during the winter of 1918-19.

With the opening of Long Wharf and abandoning of the old San Francisco & Alameda Railroad's Short Pier during 1870, the freight-car transfer boat THOROUGHFARE was placed in operation to the Second Street wharf in San Francisco. This arrangement solved the problem of trans-bay freight service.

Hourly trips were being made to San Francisco by the passenger ferry boats. The EL CAPITAN plied the waters from Oakland Point Wharf and the Alameda from Alameda Point Wharf. During 1871 a total of 1,867,423 passengers were carried on Central Pacific boats. On September 29, 1873, the Alameda Wharf was abandoned and the Alameda trains were routed to the Oakland Long Wharf, where the ALAMEDA alternated with the EL CAPITAN on a half-hour schedule. Later another wharf was constructed at Alameda by the Southern Pacific Coast Railroad, an enterprise of Senator James G. Fair, which operated between Alameda and Santa Cruz, and which in turn, was taken over by the Southern Pacific Railroad, successor to the Central Pacific, in 1887.

The Oakland ferry boats started landing at Central Pacific's new passenger station in San Francisco near the foot of Market Street on

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September 4, 1875; and the slip on Davis Street, between Pacific and Broadway wharves, which had been used since ferry service was established in 1862, was abandoned. During 1877, the Ferry Station of Central Pacific was moved and re-arranged to conform to three new ferry slips built by the Harbor Commissioners, and this station continued as the San Francisco terminus until the present Ferry Building was erected in 1896.

A description of the Oakland Long Wharf taken from "Leslie's Weekly" of May 11, 1878, which does not agree in every detail as to size with other accounts, is as follows:

"Central Pacific railroad terminus. Overland railroad wharf at Oakland, Cal., extending across the San Francisco Bay toward Goat Island. (Colloquial name for Yerba Buena Island). It has a total length of 10,500 feet or nearly two miles from the water line at Oakland. The extension is 3,609 feet long, 2,600 feet of which is wide enough for three tracks. The last 1,200 feet of the wharf is wide enough for twelve tracks, and has at least two mammoth freight sheds upon it, 600 to 800 feet in length. There is a slip at the end of the wharf having ample accommodations for four of the largest vessels afloat, the Great Eastern alone excepted. There are two slips for the passengers and freight steamers with a depth of 24 feet of water at low tide. Between the eastern side of Goat Island and the railroad wharf there is a deep water channel having a depth of 40 feet at low tide. When vessels come into the port with special cargoes or other merchandise for shipment overland, they go into railroad slips and put their cargoes directly aboard the cars, and thus the smallest possible amount of handling is incurred and freight expenses kept at the lowest possible figures. The wharf was finished by the first of June last.

(NOTE: Long Wharf was opened for traffic on January 16, 1871.) Cost of the wharf structures exceeds \$1,000,000.

The timbers, piling, etc., were brought from the summit of the Sierra Nevada and from Puget Sound."

Long Wharf soon became inadequate due to the tremendous increase in passenger and freight traffic, and the teredo carried on relentless damage to the piling, so that studies were started

to expand and improve the facilities. This resulted in the construction of the present facilities, which was the largest undertaking of its kind in the world at that time.

Accurate records on the construction of the Oakland Mole and Pier are scarce, as many of Southern Pacific's pertinent records were destroyed in the fire following the earthquake of 1906.

Construction was started in 1879 and was carried on by labor force of some 700 Chinese coolies. One of the best available early accounts of the construction, furnished by Southern Pacific Company, is contained in the March 11, 1882 issue of Harper's Weekley, as follows:

"Our illustration shows the ferry depot and slip at the end of Oakland Mole, San Francisco Bay, California. The structure forms the western end of the transcontinental railroad system terminating in the Central and Southern Pacific railroads. With this depot the overland passengers to San Francisco leaves the cars in which he has ~~crossed~~ the continent, and boards a ferry steamer (one of which is shown at her moorings outside the slip), which carries him across the bay to San Francisco. The distance between the two ferry landings is nearly four miles, and the average time of transit twenty minutes.

"Oakland Mole is an embankment of riprap and earth, 6650 feet in length, connecting the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay with deep water. For a distance of nearly a mile, it has a uniform breadth on top of 100 feet, which affords room for four railroad tracks and a carriage road. It broadens toward the depot and slip to 280 feet in breadth. The depot buildings cover an area 1100 by 240 feet. They form a light and graceful group, but they have been built with a proper regard for strength. They stand on a solid foundation of concrete, and are built of iron and wood. The slip is 600 feet in length, and wide enough to accommodate the largest ferry steamer on the bay.

"The Mole and new ferry slip have been constructed as a substitute, for passenger traffic, for Long Wharf, a wooden pier about two miles in length, and used hereto-for as a ferry landing on the Oakland shore. The rapidity with which the teredo

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"honey-combed the piles of Long Wharf made it very expensive to keep in repair. It was also considered, on the same account, insecure, although no accident has ever occurred on it which has been traceable to that cause. Hereafter Long Wharf will be used solely by freight trains, and its slips and wharves will be devoted to loading and discharging deep-water ships.

"It has taken over two years to build the Mole, and over a million cubic yards of material, quarried in the Coast Range thirty miles off, has been used in its formation. Nearly a year has also been consumed in the construction of the depot and slip. The entire structure as it stands today has cost the Central Pacific Railroad Company close upon a million dollars, nearly one-third of which has been spent on the depot buildings and ferry slip. One hundred and sixteen trains pass in and out of the depot daily. But the magnitude of the ferry service between Oakland and San Francisco will be better understood when it is said that on Sundays and other holidays from 25,000 to 30,000 persons pass to and fro across the bay.

"The Mole, depot, and slip were formally opened to passenger traffic on the evening of the 19th of January 1882, a grand ball being held in the new buildings for the benefit of the Veterans' Home fund, and under the auspices of the railroad officers. Over 3000 persons attended the ball, which netted the Veterans' Home nearly \$1,300."

The Oakland Mole and Ferry Depot was actually opened to traffic January 22, after having been formally opened to the public with the grand ball on Saturday night, January 19th.

The buildings and facilities were the last word in those days when women wore bustles and high button shoes, and men wore embroidered vests and top hats. It had two "commodious waiting rooms". The upper room was connected by side aprons to the saloon decks of the waiting ferries.

The main train shed which terminated with the ferry slip was 120 feet wide and 510 feet long. Six tracks extended into this covering approximately 270 feet, leaving a milling area of about 60 feet in front of the two and three story administration and circulation building built in under the roof of the main structure. The first 90 feet of this structure provided offices for the Superintendent and for the Division Headquarters on the second and third floors, with ramps to the second deck flanking the offices on each side. The other 90 feet of the upper deck accommodated waiting and rest room facilities for passengers. The main deck provided gang ways and the main apron to the main deck of the ferries; and besides waiting rooms for passengers, there were ticket offices, and offices for the Trainmaster, Wharfinger, and accommodations for train and ferry boat personnel.

This main shed was flanked on either side by two smaller sheds 60 feet wide and overall length of 720 feet with seven 30-foot bays, or 210 feet, extending on beyond to the west of the main structure. Each of these two sheds had three tracks that extended their full length with trackage extending out beyond along the jettys. The tracks were spaced to provide generous room for horse drawn baggage trucks to maneuver.

A fourth shed of the same 60-foot width, but less 90 feet at the westerly end in length was added to the south flank of the structure. Also, eleven 30-foot bays, or 330 feet, of cover over six tracks leading to the main shed, and over two tracks leading to the northerly shed for the same distance was added to accommodate longer trains. These covers were smaller in span and height, actually three spans in the extension to the main train shed, and one span over the two tracks of the other shed. There were in all fourteen tracks placed under cover, with eight of these for the added length.

The Superintendent's office in the administration building had a commanding view facing the inbound trains with a continuous row of high windows, and in the gable of the neo-Greek architecture was a huge clock.

The main train shed was spanned by arched trusses of twelve-panel triangular, or "Warren", type arrangement of the web members. The top chord was of laminated timbers and the lower chord was of two parallel iron bars, hinged at panel points. The compression members of the web members were timbers and the tension members of iron rods. Columns were 12-inch square timbers, faced with 1-inch redwood with bead molded corners. The trusses were spaced on 30-foot centers, and purlins were trussed members. Skylights extended the full length of the structure over two panels at the ridge and over two panels at either side at the clearstory wall, which presented a light and airy appearance. However, the skylight at the ridge was later changed to a monitor type over the length of the tracks, only, with two-thirds of the clearstory wall in glass and the other third in louvers, the better to let smoke from the engines escape. Some of the original skylight remains over the administration building.

The flanking sheds were spanned by similar trusses of ten panels, but not so high, leaving a clearstory for the length of the main shed. The skylight at the ridge was, likewise, changed to a monitor type similar to the main roof. The roof was of corrugated iron, and all the other facing material was of board and batten of redwood applied to design with Victorian moldings and details.

Tall tank towers with steeply hipped roof and finials flanked the main apron of the ferry slip and housed the aprons to the saloon deck. These landmarks were later removed and roofed over as shelters for the aprons, only.

There was a long and bitter struggle, that at times erupted in violence, and even bloodshed, between the railroad and the City of Oakland, over the ownership and control of the water-front along the Estuary. This was complicated by a deal whereby the Oakland waterfront lands had been tied up in the hands of Horace W. Carpentier, one of the founders of Oakland and its first mayor, since 1852; and who had exacted a deal with the Big Four whereby he retained a controlling interest in the Oakland Waterfront Company and, also, became a member of Central Pacific's board of directors. But that is an involved chapter with many legal complications, which was not settled until 1910, and will not be covered here.

The Oakland Mole and Pier has undergone normal expansion and changes with the growth of the West. Additional areas were filled and another pier known as the Asiatic Pier was built. This pier with its warehouse burned down in 1945. The inter-urban commuter service was electrified between 1908 and 1911, which heralded the era of the "Big Red Trains"; but they, too, forsook the Pier for the Bay Bridge upon its completion in 1938. Otherwise, the facilities, through their tarnished and soot-laden facade, and the deterioration from neglect and wrecking crews during its numbered months of survival, are very much as they have been throughout its eighty years of existence.

On July 30, 1958, the ferry boat SAN LEANDRO, left the Oakland Pier at 12:10 Noon, after picking up passengers from the Shasta Daylight, which marked the end of the ferry boats on San Francisco Bay. In its heyday in 1930, the Southern Pacific fleet numbered 43 boats. During the year, 40,000,000 passengers and 6,000,000 automobiles were carried by this fleet. During 1957 only 610,000 passengers were transported across the Bay. At the end, besides the SAN LEANDRO, only the BERKELEY, which was held as standby service, remained of this large fleet.

The completion of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge sounded the death-knell to the ferry boat era on the San Francisco Bay. During that era some 90 craft including the bright orange Key System craft, the red

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San Rafael-Richmond ferries, and the white Southern Pacific, Western Pacific and Santa Fe fleets plied the waters of San Francisco Bay between Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, Sausalito, Tiburon, Vallejo and San Francisco, not to mention the river boats from Sacramento and Stockton.

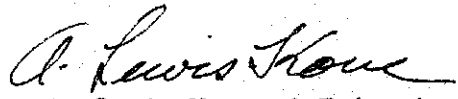
The present lease on the 80-acre site upon which this transportation complex was built and grew was executed between the City of Oakland and the Railroad upon the settlement of the waterfront question in 1910, and it will expire on November 23, 1960. It will then revert to the control of the Oakland Port Commission. The terminal facilities for Southern Pacific are being transferred to the Sixteenth Street Depot, which henceforth, or until other arrangements are developed in the future, will be the western terminus of Southern Pacific's transcontinental route over the Sierras, and from which point passengers will be transported to San Francisco by bus over the Bay Bridge.

In the meantime, since the exodus of the ferries, the facilities were used for mail and express handling operations, and as headquarters for the Western Division. Then, two minutes before midnight of Saturday, May 14, 1960, the flat mechanical bleat of the air-horn of the dieselized train No. 20 filled the great shed-like and nearly empty building, and started off on track 13, carrying mail for Portland, Oregon, plus a few railroad buffs who wanted to be in on the death of a great era in transportation on San Francisco Bay. The only sound now is that of the wrecking crews removing that which must be removed before expiration of the lease. The main buildings will remain as property of the lessor, to an unknown fate.

Since that day of January 19, 1882, when the terminal was formally and triumphantly opened to the public with the Grand Ball, it has had a glorious history, and has succored to the comfort and conveniences of the traveling public, from tramps to kings, princes, potentates, famous personalities, and even famous criminals on their way to incarceration at Alcatraz. It has seen the red carpet rolled out across the apron to the ferry, and it has seen the sadness of last farewells and the joy of hellos. Its passing is a deathknell to an era that, because of the genius of man, will never be again.

The future for the site appears to hold promise for another, and possibly more dramatic development in transportation, for plans of the Bay Area Rapid Transit District contemplate using the site for the Oakland terminus of a proposed tube under the bay to San Francisco, at which time the name Oakland Mole(hole) might be even more appropriate.

Prepared by



A. Lewis Koue, A.I.A., Architect

Preservation Officer
East Bay Chapter, A.I.A.,

August 23, 1960

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